

For Immediate Release

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FNHA awarded \$2.5 million to develop a community-led model of harm reduction for opioid use

COAST SALISH TERRITORY – The First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) is honoured to be awarded \$2.5 million over five years, its largest research grant to date, from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR). FNHA will collaborate closely with academic partners on this research project to improve harm reduction for First Nations across BC, employing a ground-breaking decolonizing approach that has not been used before.

“This project is innovative and the first of its kind, drawing on the strengths of First Nations perspectives to do community-based harm reduction research. Communities are tackling the opioid crisis in culturally relevant ways, and we need to ensure this knowledge makes its way into evidence,” says Sonia Isaac-Mann, FNHA’s Vice President, Programs and Services.

FNHA’s overarching goal is to develop and articulate a First Nations-led, Indigenous model of harm reduction for opioid use that is adaptable to the specific cultural and contextual needs of Indigenous communities. This community-led research project will be a great step forward in the FNHA’s already unique work in harm reduction and overall health and wellness for First Nations in BC.

“Working with and guided by First Nations communities, the FNHA and academic leadership will identify promising practices to address opioid use and prevent overdose. The final result of this work will be an Indigenous harm reduction model,” says the FNHA’s Namaste Marsden, Acting Director of Research and Knowledge Exchange (RKE).

The project leverages the FNHA’s opioid response work to date, using knowledge gathered through the \$2.4 million in harm reduction grant funding that the FNHA administered to communities in February 2018. The project also addresses multiple directives in the [Framework for Action](#) designed by provincial partners to effectively respond to this opioid public health emergency.

The research project is composed of two distinct parts. In the first phase of the project, the research team will collect information from across Canada using studies, online Indigenous health resources, opinion papers, reports, case studies, videos and oral testimonies. Knowledge will also be gathered using a ground-breaking approach that draws on Indigenous storytelling methods with Indigenous people who use substances as well as Elders, Indigenous service providers, Knowledge Keepers, and staff from supervised injection/overdose prevention sites in BC.

The second phase of research includes five individual community-based harm reduction research projects, one in each of the FNHA’s geographic regions. First Nations communities will direct and

guide all project activities, receiving training and support from the research project team. These five community-based research projects will contribute to a sorely needed evidence base.

The research project team is a first-ever combination of FNHA staff, led by FNHA's Amanda Ward, Director of RKE, Indigenous health researchers, mental health and addictions researchers, harm reduction specialists and legal experts. Strengths of the research grant application include its multidisciplinary project team and the team's expertise.

Partners in this research project include Simon Fraser University's Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addictions (CARMHA), the BC Centre on Substance Use (BCCSU), University of Victoria's Centre for Indigenous Research and Community-Led Engagement (CIRCLE), University of British Columbia's School of Population and Public Health (SPPH), the Gender and Sexual Health Initiative (GSHI) at the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, Pivot Legal Society, and the Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN).

This research project will be guided by the FNHA's [7 Directives](#) and rooted in its [Indigenous Harm Reduction Principles and Practices](#). Learn more about the CIHR's 2018 Spring Project grants [here](#). This research project is part of a recent CIHR announcement of an investment of \$378 million, to support 405 health research projects across Canada.

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